

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 2614

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CA

SUBJECT: QUEBEC ELECTION ANALYSIS

REF: OTTAWA 2561: QUEBEC 171

1. RESULTS. LANDSLIDE WIN BY ROBERT BOURASSA'S QUEBEC LIBERAL PARTY HAS BEEN WIDELY -- AND ACCURATELY -- AHAILED AS A VICTORY FOR FEDERALISM OVER SEPARATISM. LIBERALS NOW HOLD 102 PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY'S 110 SEATS WITH 55 PERCENT OF POPULAR VOTE. PARTI QUEBECOIS (PQ) HOLDS SIX SEATS WITH 30 PERCENT OF POLL AND IS THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION PARTY IN THE ASSEMBLY. TWO CREDITISTE (PC) MEMBERS WERE ELECTED WITH PARTY WINNING 10 PERCENT OF POLL, BUT UNDER PROVINCIAL CONSTITUTION (REQUIRING 12 SEATS OR 20 PERCENT OF POLL) CANNOT BE CONSIDERED A "PARTY" IN CHAMBER AND WILL SIT AS INDEPENDENTS. UNION NATIONAL (UN) ALL BUT WIPED OUT WITH LESS THAN FIVE PERCENT OF POLL AND NO SEATS. ALL OF THE POLITICAL LEADERS EXCEPT BOURASSA WERE DEFEATED IN THEIR RESPECTIVE RIDINGS: LEVESQUE (PQ), LOUBIER (UN) AND DUPUIS (SC), WHO EVEN LOST HIS DEPOSIT. THUS LEVESQUE ACHIEVED HIS "MINIMUM GOAL" OF THE PQS BECOMING THE OPPOSITION PARTY BUT WITHOUT HIMSELF AS THE "LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION" IN
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THE ASSEMBLY.

2. VICTORY FOR FEDERALISM, HOWEVER, BY NO MEANS IMPLIES DEMISE OF SEPARATIST SENTIMENT OR OF THE PQ OR END OF

FEDERALIST-SEPARATIST CONTEST. CERTAINLY SOME IMPORTANT PART OF LIBERALS' VICTORY CAN BE DIRECTLY ATTRIBUTED TO THEIR SUCCESSFUL EXPLOITATION OF BREAD-AND-BUTTER ISSUES TOO. FOUNDED IN 1966, PQ NOW REPRESENTS OFFICIAL OPPOSITION AND, AT PRESENT, ONLY "RECOGNIZED" POLITICAL ALTERNATIVE TO LIBERALS IN QUEBEC. ELECTION RESULTS HAVE THUS POSED AS MANY PROBLEMS AS THEY HAVE SOLVED AND ARE SUBJECT OF ENDLESS ANALYSIS IN MEDIA.

3. ALTHOUGH ANALYSIS NOT COMPLETE, IT APPEARS MOST OF LIBERAL GAIN OF 10 PERCENT AND PQ OF SIX PERCENT MAY HAVE COME DIRECTLY FROM FORMER UN VOTES. IN ABSENCE SUPPORT FOR THIRD PARTY, WHICH MIGHT HAVE SPLIT FEDERALIST STRENGTH, PQ CANDIDATES WERE IN DIRECT CONFRONTATION WITH LIBERAL CANDIDATES. THIS ACCOUNTS FOR VAST DISPARITY BETWEEN PQ POPULAR VOTE AND THE MEAGER SIX SEATS IT WON. MANY COMMENTATORS, INCLUDING HIGHLY RESPECTED CLAUDE RYAN, EDITOR MONTREAL DEVOIR, A "NATIONALIST" BUT ANTI-SEPARATIST, HAVE SUGGESTED URGENT NEED FOR SOME FORM OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION TO AVOID SIMILAR IMBALANCE IN FUTURE.

4. ANALYSIS. AS SUGGESTED IN OTTAWA 2561, BASIC ISSUE IN CAMPAIGN WAS SEPARATISM VS. FEDERALISM, AND RESULTS BEAR OUT THIS ASSESSMENT. ALTHOUGH NOT ALL PQ VOTERS ARE CONVINCED SEPARATISTS, ELECTION POLARIZED AROUND THIS ISSUE TO REMARKABLE DEGREE, PARTICULARLY IN LAST WEEK. THIS MAY LEAVE POLITICAL OPENING FOR FEDERALIST CONSERVATIVE OR LEFT-WING PARTY IN QUEBEC. PQ LEADER LEVESQUE HAS BEEN QUOTED AS SPECULATING THAT PQ COULD HAVE "SWEEPED THE PROVINCE" IF IT HAD ABANDONED SEPARATISM AND RUN SOLELY AS LEFTIST REFORM PARTY. VIRTUAL DESTRUCTION OF UN AND PC LEAVES NO CURRENT ALTERNATIVE OTHER THAN PQ SHOULD BOURASSA RUN INTO ECONOMIC SET-BACK OR OTHER DIFFICULTIES. FEDERAL CONSERVATIVE LEADER STANFIELD HAS BEEN MAKING SUBSTANTIAL EFFORT TO ESTABLISH CONSERVATIVE ORGANIZATION
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IN QUEBEC POINTING TOWARDS NEXT FEDERAL ELECTIONS. CONSERVATIVES NOW HOLD ONLY TWO OF QUEBEC'S 74 SEATS IN OTTAWA. IF STANFIELD IS EVEN MODERATELY SUCCESSFUL, POSSIBILITY EXISTS OF BUILDING VIABLE PROVINCIAL CONSERVATIVE PARTY LINKED IN SOME MEASURE WITH FEDERAL ORGANIZATION. OTHERS, PERHAPS EVEN SOCIALIST NEW DEMOCRATIX PARTY, MAY SEEK TO FILL THE GAP.

5. DEFEAT OF MAJOR PQ LEADERS, LEVESQUE HIMSELF, ECONOMIST JACQUES PARIZEAU, AND OTHERS, COUPLED WITH FAILURE TRANSLATE POPULAR VOTE INTO SEATS, WILL BE BITTER PILL FOR RADICAL PQ ELEMENTS. VIOLENCE IN AUTUMN 1970 REPELLED MOST QUEBECKERS AND WAS DENOUNCED

BY LEVESQUE AND OTHER RESPONSIBLE SEPARATISTS. FAILURE OF "SYSTEM" TO WORK MORE IN THEIR INTERESTS, HOWEVER, COULD PROVOKE FRUSTRATED RADICALS TO TAKE MORE MILITANT STANCE. PAUCITY OF LEGISLATIVE SEATS AND THINK CHANCE OF PROVIDING EFFECTIVE PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION WILL PLACE TREMENDOUS STRAIN ON TAUT FABRIC OF PQ POLITICAL APPARATUS.

6. PQ GAIN -- UP 6 PERCENT TO 30 IN THIS ELECTION OVER 24 PERCENT WON IN 1970 ELECTION -- HAS NOT SURPRISED MOST PUNDITS AND MAY INCLUDE SOME WHO ARE NOT WEDDED TO SEPARATISM COME WHAT MAY. FACT REMAINS, HOWEVER, THAT GAIN WAS MADE DESPITE IMPRESSIVE ECONOMIC PROGRESS IN QUEBEC IN PAST THREE YEARS AND MAJOR EFFORT BY FEDERAL GOVERNMENT UNDER TRUDEAU, SUCH AS BY INCREASED EQUALIZATION PAYMENTS, TO CONVINCE QUEBECKERS THEY ARE BETTER OFF IN CANADA THAN GOING IT ALONE. BUT HIGHLY CONTROVERSIAL BILINGUAL POLICIES FOR FEDERAL EXECUTIVES, EQUALIZATION PAYMENTS AND OTHER ECONOMIC PRIORITIES AFFORDED QUEBEC BY FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WERE AN OBVIOUS FACTOR IN TRUDEAU'S LOSSES ELSEWHERE IN CANADA LAST OCTOBER. GIVEN BOURASSA'S VICTORY, VOTERS IN WESTERN AND ATLANTIC PROVINCES MAY BE LESS THAN EVER INCLINED TO SUPPORT FEDERAL POLICIES DESIGNED TO WOO QUEBECKERS TO FEDERALISM, NOT ONLY BECAUSE THEY MAY NOT SEEM NECESSARY BUT BECAUSE THEY MAY APPEAR TO MAKE TRUDEAU EVEN MORE QUEBEC-DEPENDENT.

7. NEVERTHELESS, BOURASSA AND FEDERALISM WON IN 1973 AND WON IMPRESSIVELY. QUEBECKERS, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, A CONFIDENTIAL

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SOLID MAJORITY (60 PERCENT AGAINST 40 PERCENT) OF FRENCH QUEBECKERS, ARE EVIDENTLY PREPARED TO GIVE FEDERALIST OPTION EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO DEMONSTRATE ITS VIABILITY FOR THE PROVINCE. BOURASSA NOW HAS UNTIL 1978 TO DELIVER ON HIS CAMPAIGN PROMISES AND STRENGTHEN THE FEDERALIST OPTION IN QUEBEC.

8. MEANING FOR U.S. US-CANADIAN RELATIONS WERE NOT A FACTOR IN CAMPAIGN. LIBERAL VICTORY COULD MAKE QUEBEC A MORE ATTRACTIVE LOCUS FOR INVESTMENT, FROM BOTH U.S. AND ELSEWHERE IN CANADA, WHICH WOULD IN TURN STIMULATE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND IMPROVE PROSPECTS FOR QUEBEC REMAINING IN CONFEDERATION.

9. CONCLUSION. PRIME MINISTER TRUDEAU HAS EXPRESSED GREAT PLEASURE AT RESULTS, WHICH HE CONSIDERS VERY MUCH IN INTEREST OF CANADA AS A WHOLE. HE POINTED OUT, HOWEVER, THAT IT WAS AN ELECTION AND NOT A REFERENDUM. DISPITE PROBLEMS OUTLINED ABOVE, BOURASSA'S VICTORY DEMONSTRATES THERE EXISTS LARGE RESERVOIR OF PRO-FEDERALIST SUPPORT IN QUEBEC. PQ GAINS DO NOT PRECISELY INDICATE THE DEGREE OF SUPPORT FOR THE SEPARATIST MOVEMENT, BUT THERE REMAINS

A SOLID CORE OF PROPONENTS OF SEPARATION, POSSIBLY 20 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE OR 27 PERCENT OF FRENCH-CANADIAN VOTERS WHO FAVOR SOME FORM OF POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE. SEPARATISM WILL CONTINUE AS STRONG FORCE IN QUEBEC SOCIETY, AND ITS RADICAL ELEMENTS HAVE CONSIDERABLE POTENTIAL FOR CAUSING TROUBLE. EVOLUTION OF PQ STRUCTURE, COMPOSITION, AND PLATFORM WILL BE VERY UNCERTAIN AND CHANGEABLE. BOURASSA HAS GIVEN CANADA "BREATHING SPACE" AND BOUGHT MORE TIME, WITH FIRM MANDATE, TO FIND WAYS TO MEET PAYROLLS AND FULFILL ASPIRATIONS OF MOST QUEBECKERS FOR "EQUALITY" OF THEIR PROVINCE WITHIN CANADA AND SECURITY OF THEIR SPECIAL CULTURAL HERITAGE WITHIN CONFEDERATION. THERE REMAINS A LONG WAY TO GO YET TO REPAIR "ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF INJUSTICE" AND TO REPLACE THE FEELING OF INFERIORITY WITH A SPIRIT OF MAITRES CHEZ NOUS. THE SIZE OF BOURASSA'S LEGISLATIVE EDGE MAY ITSELF BE A HANDICAP, BUT IT NEED NOT BE. EVEN THE SYMPATHY AND SUPPORT OF OTTAWA MAY BE A HANDICAP, BUT THEY NEED NOT BE. AFTER ALL, AS TRANSPORT MINISTER
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JEAN MARCHAND SAID PUBLICLY TO JOURNALISTS WHO WERE ANALYSING BOURASSA'S ELECTION VICTORY AND FUTURE PROBLEMS IN NEGATIVE TERMS, "I'M NOT GOING TO SYMPATHIZE WITH BOURASSA FOR LOSING*" SCHMIDT

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